Remarks at a Democratic Business Council Dinner
March 16, 1998

Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you Tom, Steve, Len, Terry. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for being here tonight, for your support for the Democratic Party, and especially for the Business Council.

The two things that I really like, that have kind of flowered in the last 5 years since I've been here for our party, are this Democratic Business Council and the Women's Leadership Forum. And Hillary is in Georgia tonight at a WLF meeting. We really believe in what they have done to broaden the base of the Democratic Party—not just the financial base but also the political base of the party—bringing people in and giving them a voice and giving them a chance to be heard and bringing in new areas of expertise that have made a real difference to us. And so I thank you for that.

I was sitting here tonight wondering what I ought to say. One of you gave me this little cup of coffee with my name on it—a little cup. If this is the case, we won't have any small coffees at the White House. [*Laughter*] I thought that was pretty funny. [*Laughter*] Another one of you in the line said that your 96-year-old grandmother said to tell the President that he and that young man are doing a good job. I said, "Who's the young man?" And she said, "Al Gore." [*Laughter*] That really hurt. [*Laughter*]

Today I did two things that embody what I hope the next 3 years will be about, namely, taking advantage of these good times: first balanced budget in a generation and the lowest unemployment, the lowest crime rate in 24 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 27 years, highest homeownership in history, lowest inflation in 30 years—these good times, taking advantage of them and preparing for the long-term prosperity and success of the American people, and trying to advance the cause of peace and freedom and prosperity throughout the world.

I started the day by going out to a high school in suburban Maryland and meeting with two dozen other people, including the superintendent of schools in New York City, the mayor of Los Angeles, the Governors of West Virginia and Maryland, and any number of other experts who came together to sit and talk with me—educational experts—about a big part of one of our country's most profound challenges, and that is the low level of performance of our high school seniors on international math and science tests.

One example of the general problem, which is as follows: Everybody in this country and everybody in the world with an informed opinion would tell you that the United States is fortunate enough to have the best system of higher education in the world. No one with an informed opinion would assert that we have the best system of elementary and secondary education in the world. And yet we have a lot of wonderful people out there giving their careers to teaching. And we have example after example after example of schools that are succeeding against all the odds.

Now, this school that I visited in Maryland today had white and African-American and Hispanic and Indian and Pakistani students and Arab-American students. It was an amazing—a lot of Asian-American students—it was an amazing myriad of our country just up the road in Maryland. And they have quite high levels of performance in math and science. So I went there to talk about it. And two of the people on the panel were the teacher, a Japanese-American physics teacher; and a student, a Hispanic, a young woman who was a student there. And we talked about what we could do to improve math and science education. And I talked about our plans to hook up every classroom and library in every school in America to the Internet by the year 2000. When we started in '94 only 34 percent of the schools were hooked up; today 75 percent of the schools are hooked up. That's not every classroom in every school, but at least we've got some hookups to the Internet in 75 percent of the schools in America now. So we're moving.

We talked about the plan to certify 100,000 master teachers, to make absolutely sure that they are academically well qualified to the highest degree, and then to get those people paid more, so we can put one master teacher in every school building in America to try to change the culture of learning and the standards of learning. We talked about the need to give

teachers who are in the work force the ability to go back and train, get higher levels of training.

This is the only country in the world where you have large numbers of people teaching math and science courses that they did not major in or minor in in college, simply because of the shortage that exists. And if we don't do something, it's likely to get worse. There are over 350,000 vacancies in information technology today in America, with an average starting salary of $48,000 a year. The average salary of all teachers, including the most senior, in America, in the wealthiest school district—the average salary is not close to $48,000 a year. So this is a formidable challenge.

But the good news is, I had two dozen really smart Americans from all walks of life there in this wonderful American school. And we were working on it, and we believe we can do something about it. We know we have to have more courses offered; we know we have to train the teachers better; we know we have to find more funds for these shortage areas. But I also told the students, with whom I spoke later—and I actually didn't get booed when I said it—that I thought they should be required to take chemistry and physics and calculus and trigonometry, and that they would all need it—and that we had opened the doors to college to everyone with the balanced budget plan, with the HOPE scholarships, and all the other incentives, they needed to have to do this.

And once I assured the seniors that didn't mean they had to stay another year in high school—[*laughter*]—I got a pretty high level of support for this proposition. I think part of it is sibling malice: they liked the idea that their younger brothers and sisters might have a bigger burden than they did. [*Laughter*] But seriously, it was a very good thing. And I thought, this is what we ought to be doing. While we have the national self-confidence and the emotional room, we ought to be thinking about these big problems down the road, and we ought to be moving on them.

And tonight before I came over here, I began—true to my dear ancestors, I began what will be about a 30-hour marathon effort to close as many gaps as I can in the Irish peace process, because all the major players in the Irish peace process are coming to America for St. Patrick's Day, which will be tomorrow. And it's very good—my Cassidy relatives in Ireland sent my daughter an Irish cross, my wife an Irish pin, sent me green cufflinks to wear tomorrow and two green ties. I have to chide them; the two green ties were made in Italy, but they're beautiful nonetheless. [*Laughter*]

And I thought to myself, this is what we ought to be doing. Because the United States is fortunate that, at the end of the cold war, we don't feel our security immediately threatened, we need to be able to stand up for the long term. We need to imagine what Europe can be like if the Irish are at peace, what Europe can be like if the Bosnian peace process works, what Europe can be like if the difficulties in Kosovo are not allowed to engulf the Balkans in a new controversy. And we have the capacity to affect this.

Hillary and I are leaving on Sunday to go to Africa. It will be the first time an American President, a serving American President, has ever made a tour of sub-Saharan Africa. President Carter and President Reagan made brief stops in one country. No American President has been to these five countries where I'm going, in the way I'm going. The House of Representatives, in a bipartisan fashion passed the Africa Trade Initiative a few days ago, and I hope the Senate will pass it soon. A big part of our future will be caught up in what happens in Africa. If Africa succeeds in developing stable market-oriented democracies, then it's a big market opportunity for the United States. If Africa should become convulsed again in a whole round of political turmoil, civil war, economic degradation, there will be consequences that we will feel here.

So I thought to myself, as we were preparing for that today, this is what we ought to be doing. I met last week, late last week, with the Medicare Commission. We are now meeting for a year. We've got a Commission that I've appointed, along with congressional leaders, to try to look at the long-run health and viability of the Medicare program. Tomorrow Senator Moynihan and I and others are going to announce his support for our Medicare legislation to let people between the ages of 55 and 65 who don't have health insurance buy into Medicare if they can do it without burdening the Trust Fund. These are the kinds of things we ought to be doing.

I say this just to tell you that there is a direct connection between your support through this Business Council of our party and what

we are doing that will change the lives of the future of the American people. That's what you have to understand.

Lois Capps just won this great race in California—unbelievable victory. Now, in Washington, people tend to see every victory or defeat in great national terms. I basically spent enough time out there in the country to know that that's almost always wrong. It's against my self-interest to say it, probably, but it's wrong. She won because she's a magnificent person, because her late husband was a wonderful man, because she ran a great grassroots campaign. But the important thing is that the issues she ran on and won on are the issues that were embodied in the State of the Union or the issues that are embodied in the message of our party and the future we're trying to build for America. Don't squander the surplus until you save Social Security first, pass the Patients' Bill of Rights, focus on education, focus on the environment, focus on the long-run challenges of the country. That's what we are doing here. That's what you are a part of. That's what we want you to be a part of.

So when you go home tonight, you ought to ask yourself—and make sure you can give an answer—why did I go to that dinner tonight? Why did I write that check? You should know that because of your support, your country is stronger; we're moving in the right direction; and we're thinking about tomorrow.

Thank you very much. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:05 p.m. in the ballroom at the Sheraton Carlton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to C. Thomas Hendrickson, chair, Democratic Business Council; Steve Grossman, national chair, Leonard Barrack, national finance chair, and Terence McAuliffe, former national finance chair, Democratic National Committee; Rudy Crew, chancellor, New York City public schools; Mayor Richard Riordan of Los Angeles; Gov. Cecil H. Underwood of West Virginia; Gov. Parris N. Glendening of Maryland; and Representative Lois Capps, widow of the late Representative Walter H. Capps.

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner
March 16, 1998

Thank you very much, Len and Steve. Ladies and gentlemen, a lot of you go to a lot of these dinners. I was sitting here thinking, what could I say to you tonight that you have not heard already? Then I thought, well, maybe I should say to you tonight what you have heard already.

You may have heard me tell this story, but one of my favorite insights into communications came not at a political speech but at a rock concert several years ago, where Tina Turner was singing when she made her great comeback. She finished this new album, "Private Dancer," and she was going around the country doing these concerts. And she sang all the new songs; all the young people in the audience loved the songs. At the end she started to sing "Proud Mary," which was her first hit, and all the old guys like me loved that. And so she started to sing it a couple of times, and the crowd was cheering so loud she backed away. And finally she said, "You know, I've been singing this song for 25 years, but it gets better every time I sing it." [*Laughter*] So maybe I should just say the same old thing.

Let me say today—I'd like to talk to you about what I did today, in two different ways, because I think it stands for what I believe we ought to be doing as a country. I started today by getting in a car and driving out to suburban Maryland to a high school to meet with two dozen people, including experts in national testing, other education experts, experts in science and math education, the mayor of Los Angeles, the mayor of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the Governors of West Virginia and Maryland, the superintendent of schools in New York City, and the State superintendent in Kentucky, a number of others, to talk about math and science education and why Americans scored so low in the international math and science test for high school seniors when we were near the top of the scores of the international math and